What is MLA format?

The Modern Language Association of America (MLA) has established formatting and style rules for scholarly papers and citations, with the intention of making papers easier to read and to help writers give credit to their sources clearly and consistently.

This handout will guide you through citing information according to the *MLA Handbook*’s 8th edition, which was published in 2016. On the next two pages, we’ll walk you through creating citations for reference lists and share many examples of citations for different kinds of sources. On the last page, you’ll find examples of in-text citations.

The Core Elements

The diagram to the right lists the “core elements” of a citation, the order you’ll write them in, and the punctuation you’ll use between each element. It doesn’t matter what you’re citing—a book, a video, or even a Tweet—you’ll use the same format. *The Handbook* gives more examples of this diagram in action on pages 32-36.

How do I get help?

If you have any questions about formatting your paper or writing citations, check with your instructor first. He or she is the final authority on what your paper should look like, especially if the assignment’s requirements differ from the guidelines outlined in the MLA manual.

The Library

Your librarians can help you find good resources for your assignment.

refdesk@nu.edu
(866) 682-2237 x7900
http://library.nu.edu

The Writing Center

Writing Center consultants can help you develop your topic, organize your ideas, and proofread your paper.

WritingCenter@nu.edu
http://www.nu.edu/OurPrograms/StudentServices/WritingCenter.html
For one author:

For two authors:
Fink, Joseph, and Jeffrey Cranor. Welcome to Night Vale. Harper Perennial, 2015. (Note: Only the first author’s name is inverted.)

If your source isn’t part of a larger work, italicize the title. Use a colon before a subtitle.

If your source is part of a larger work (e.g., an article in a journal, a chapter in a book, an episode in a TV series), then you’ll also include the larger work’s title. Italicize the title of the larger work.

Aside from the authors, your source might list other people who contributed, such as editors, illustrators, or translators. You should normally include them in your citation and note their role:

If there’s more than one version or edition of your source, you’ll need to state which one you’re using.

For three or more authors, list only the first, and then “et al.”

If your source is part of a larger work (e.g., an article in a journal, a chapter in a book, an episode in a TV series), the title will be placed in quotes.
The publisher is the organization primarily responsible for producing or publishing the material. You don’t need to provide a publisher for periodicals or for websites (if the website title and publisher name are the same).

For print works, use page numbers (preceded by a “p.”) or ranges of page numbers (preceded by a “pp.”).


Patton, Declan, and Andrew McIntosh. “Head and Neck Injury Risks in Heavy Metal: Head Bangers Stuck Between Rock and a Hard Bass.” *The BMJ*, vol. 337, no. 7684, 18 December 2008. 10.1136/bmj.a2825


In some cases—mainly books—only a publication year will be available.


For ebooks, use the name of the database that hosts the book.


For other online works, use page numbers (if applicable) and the URL or DOI, and omit the period at the end of citation.


How do I write in-text citations?

Whether you're paraphrasing your source or quoting it directly, you need to tell your readers exactly where you got your information. If you don't, you may be accused of plagiarizing your source.

When you're writing a paper in MLA style, you'll use parenthetical in-text citations to ensure that you've given credit to all of your sources. Parenthetical citations usually state the last name of the author (or authors), and the page number where the original quote or idea can be found.

Here's how you can incorporate citations into your writing:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paraphrasing with author's name in text:</th>
<th>Paraphrasing with author's name in reference:</th>
<th>Quoting with author's name in the reference:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>According to Smith, students become more confident using MLA style with practice (4-5).</td>
<td>Students become more confident using MLA style with practice (Smith 112-13).</td>
<td>It is true that “students may encounter difficulties when they attempt to learn MLA for the first time” (Smith 112-13).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Citing a work with multiple authors:

Lee and Perez note that well-written citations help readers find earlier research (112-13).

Well-written citations help readers find earlier research (Lee and Perez 112-13).

Readers can use citations to locate earlier research (Park et al. 10).

Citing multiple works in the same sentence:

MLA style is used across several disciplines, including cultural studies and English (Smith 112; Lee 146).

MLA style is used frequently in cultural studies (Smith 112) and English (Lee 146).

Citing a work that’s been quoted in your source (a secondary citation):

A study by Smith finds that “students learn MLA faster than some other styles” (qtd. in Fowler: 53).

What if you are missing information?

If your source has no author, use the first word of the title in double quote marks.

It is important to use MLA correctly so that others can verify your research (“Student”).

If your source has no page numbers, use the author’s name alone.

It is important to use MLA correctly so that others can verify your research (Smith).